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THE SOLDIER.

AN AFFECTING NARRATIVE OF FACTS.

It was one of May's sweetest mornings that I met a clergyman of the village of D——, and received from him an invitation to be present at a meeting of brethren in his church. At the time appointed I was there, and with no small satisfaction listened to several who narrated their Christian experience. It was at this meeting I met the subject of this narrative, and heard from his own lips the story of his wondrous wickedness against God, and of God's more wondrous goodness and grace to him. He was in full "military costume;" a young man of fine and prepossessing appearance, apparently of good education and deep-toned piety. He was the last who addressed the meeting, nor did he do so till after being repeatedly importuned by the clergyman, and even then with much seeming reluctance. Rising leisurely, and fixing his eyes upon the clergyman, he proceeded as follows:

"I was born in this village, and here reared by pious parents, as many now present can testify. My dear mother was a woman of more than ordinary piety, and my father was a sincerely devoted and exemplary Christian. Sir, I was as unworthy of such a parentage as that parentage was deserving of the best of sons.

"Of me it might justly be said, I 'went astray from the womb.' From my childhood up, I wandered from God, till, when but a lad, I had become notorious for mischief and wickedness. My name was not only associated with the vile and abandoned, but stood first on their list. Often did my parents pray with me and for me; many were the instructions they imparted, the warnings, the admonitions, the entreaties, and the corrections I received; and many, too, the tears of sorrow and anxiety they shed for me. But I was proof against all their efforts, and my heart continued hard and unmoved; and I longed for the time I should be of age, that I might have it in my power to leave my father and mother, and unrestrainedly

take my fill of sin. The holy Sabbath and the daily hours of family devotion I hated, and longed to get away from. Many were the plans I laid and the schemes I formed to get from under the parental roof; and not because I was in love of a military life, but because it would at once deliver me from parental authority and restraint, I enlisted to be a soldier; and the more effectually to get rid of all and every thing having the appearance of religion, or even the form of godliness, I chose to enlist into a regiment then in the West Indies.

“Being the only son and the only child, it was too much for the already broken heart of my tender mother to bear up under, and praying for her unworthy child, she sunk into the peaceful grave soon after my departure. My father’s grief was equally severe, and with tears he entreated me to allow him to buy me off. But no; my hatred of religion, and perceiving no other way of escape from it, determined me to reject his kind offer. Up to this time, my mother had hoped I would repent of what I had done, permit my father to buy me off, and stay at home. But, sir, the language is not yet framed which could paint her sorrow and my hardness, her love and my indifference, on this, to her, so distressing occasion. O the mercy that could pity and pardon a wretch like me!”

He now wept bitterly—tried once and again to speak, but utterance failed him. When his feeling had somewhat subsided, he said,

“On her knees, sir, with tears she prayed me not to leave her. ‘Your father,’ said she, ‘will buy you off. O, my son—my only son—my only child, do not break your mother’s heart, and draw down the curse of God upon your own head. Think of your precious soul. O, what must become of it, if you become a soldier!’

“All in tears, my father sat in pensive silence and beheld the scene. I felt I loved them: gladly would I have staid at home—but their religion! It was their RELIGION, sir, not them, I hated; and to get away from it, I resolved to go away from them.

“My mother, still solicitous for my everlasting welfare, when she put up my clothes, secreted a small Bible

within the folds of one of my shirts. This I found not out till far at sea, when, on changing my linen, it dropt out. When I saw the Bible I felt mad with rage, snatched it up, ran on deck, and cast it overboard as far as I could throw it.

"When I joined my regiment in the West-Indies, I cast off all restraints, and sinned with a high hand. The sins I there committed make me tremble and blush when I think of them. I stuck at nothing, how bad soever; I feared not God—he was not in all my thoughts; I regarded not future consequences; and, sir, nothing but *grace worthy of God—grace free and sovereign—grace abounding to the chief of sinners—grace that seeks and finds the sinner, before the sinner seeks or possesses it, could have reached my case.* Some, if they will, may boast their 'works,' but I must ever say, 'Not for works of righteousness that I have done, but according to his mercy he saved me.'

"Oh, to grace how great a debtor!"

"I had gone into the woods with my companions in sin, where we sought to hide our guilt from the eyes of men, when the sound of distant 'psalm singing' broke upon my ear. It was the first I had heard since I left my father's house. My attention was arrested; I stood still and listened, and thoughts altogether different from any which had heretofore occupied my mind, laid hold upon it; and tears, astonishing myself unaccustomed to weep, ran from my eyes. 'Home' stood before me. My heart melted like wax. My father's prayers—my mother's prayers—the grief and sorrow I had caused them—their often mingled and bitter tears on my account—Sabbaths at home—family worship in my father's house—my sins, my heinous sins, against God, against my dear parents, against many youthful companions, and against my own soul—all came crowding upon my remembrance and heart, until I trembled in view of the wrath of Almighty God, which I so justly deserved to suffer, and which I thought had then overtaken me.

"At first my companions mocked at my distress; but

as my convictions and distress increased, they became frightened, and left me. When I recovered strength sufficient to rise—for I had fallen to the earth—I walked as I could towards the place whence the sound proceeded, where I heard the voice of a preacher: it was a missionary there preaching to a congregation of Negroes. Unperceived, I lay under a bush and listened to the remainder of the sermon, and heard also when they were again to meet for worship. It would be impossible to describe how my nights and days were passed till then. I had no Bible, nor was there in the regiment a man to whom I could make known my distress, or apply for advice and instruction.

“At the time appointed by the missionary, I was again secreted behind my bush, where, from day to day, I had spent much time in almost hopeless prayers and tears. The missionary came, but he brought no comfort, no consolation to me; and at night I returned to my quarters as one that had no hope. O that night—never to be forgotten while I have a mind to think. I felt, yea, I believed, that God had hid his face from my tears, and shut out for ever my prayers from him. The sermon served only to call up to my view fresh guilt, and more terribly make manifest my exposure to the ‘wrath to come.’ As the messenger of God, it ‘found me out,’ and cried to my heart, ‘Thou art the man!’ As the ‘sword of the Spirit,’ it inflicted new wounds upon my mind, and tore more widely open such as already bled, till, as the royal Psalmist says, the ‘pains of hell got hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow.’

“For some time, despair and death were before me; I refused to eat my bread, because of ‘a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.’ Awful, indeed, was the realization I then experienced of that truth, ‘There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.’ There was none for me: in my thoughts of God none; in the recollections I had of his word none; none in my own heart. I could find none on earth—I expected none in heaven. Thoughts of the *past* were dreadful—I trembled at the prospect of the *future*. I was afraid to look up to God—I thought him my enemy.

Perish I could not—pray I dared not—and what to do ‘to be saved,’ I knew not.

“My former companions now came about me in crowds, some coaxing me, others swearing at me, many laughing at me, but all mocking me. With much feeling, I reminded them of the fearful extent to which I had run in the ways of sin and folly—that they had prompted me on, and madly followed after—and that it was of the ‘Lord’s mercy we were not consumed!’ I fearlessly made known to them the change which had taken place in my mind: what now were my views of the sins with which we were then chargeable—of myself and of them as transgressors in the sight of God; and what would be the sad and everlasting consequences, if we persisted in our wicked courses, and refused to repent and turn unto the Lord. With many tears, I told them how I trembled before God for myself and for them; that I would cheerfully submit to any punishment they could inflict upon me, could I undo the sins they had led me to commit, and avert from them and myself the misery to which the guilt of those sins exposed us as transgressors of the righteous laws of God, destroyers of the souls of others, and despisers of his Son Jesus Christ. I spoke to them of sin, of hell, of God, of the judgment to come, as I then felt, and which they too felt; and I continued speaking, until not a voice was to be heard except my own; yea, till all, either from fear or shame, walked off and left me, a ‘prey,’ as before, to my own fears and sorrows. The whole barracks now rang of the new ‘Christian.’

“I had gone to almost every man in the regiment, inquiring for a Bible; but no Bible was to be found. An officer hearing I was in search of a Bible, sent me word to call upon him, and he would give me one. My heart leaped for joy, and without delay I waited upon the officer to receive it. He sat for a time staring at me, then handed me a small package, carefully wrapped up and sealed, with the inscription ‘Holy Bible’ written upon it. I thanked him, praised the Lord, and hastened back to the barrack-room. You may imagine what was my disappointment and mortification, when, upon opening the wrapper, I

found, instead of a 'Holy Bible,' a dirty pack of cards! This act of an officer, emboldened my enemies, and the room rang with shouts of, 'Well done'—Served him right'—'Just as it should be, my boys,' etc.

"As a retreat from my persecutors, I now spent much of my time in the woods, under the bush where I first heard the missionary preaching to his black congregation, and where, in my supplications to God, I prayed to be directed where I might find a Bible. You may judge of my surprise, when, one day, on coming to my bush, I found under it a new Bible! Overcome with joy, I fell upon my knees, and thanked and praised God for the gift. When I had finished my devotions, I heard a rustling among the bushes, as if some one approached me; I looked whence the noise proceeded, and to my great joy, saw the missionary. He informed me that, on a previous occasion, while waiting for his congregation, he overheard me praying to God to direct me where I might obtain a Bible—he had brought me one, and had listened with pleasing emotion to the thanksgivings I had rendered to God for it. It is needless to say that he inquired into my history and the state of my mind, all of which I told him, and that I received from him such instruction and advice as encouraged and somewhat comforted my drooping and disconsolate spirit. He also prayed with me, and frequently afterwards did we pray together.

"I continued to attend his ministry, therein seeking for and waiting upon the Lord: nor was it long till he appeared for my help. 'Faith came by hearing,' so that I could adopt the language of the apostle, and say, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have *peace* with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' And, sir, it was indeed a peace 'passing all understanding,' staying and keeping the heart, and filling it 'with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.'

"The great questions now were, 'What shall I render unto the Lord?' 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' 'How can I best glorify thy great name, and do others good? For this purpose I commenced, evening after evening, reading my Bible in the barracks. This was met by great opposition. To drown my voice, some sung songs, others cursed and swore, and many laughed and mocked;

a few, however, night after night, gathered around me and listened with attention to the word of God; nor did they hear, I hope, in vain, as it was not long before, with pleasure, I saw the tear drop from the eye of one, and another, and another, while some in silence retired to pray.

"For some time I suffered greatly for my religion; persecution ran high against me, and those who could and should have shielded me, took pleasure also to vex and trouble me. But in the Lord I had a 'friend sticking closer than a brother,' and making 'his grace sufficient for me,' till by my steadfast, unflinching, and upright Christian conduct, I put persecution to shame—I might say at an end.

"Finding that neither their frowns nor threats could terrify, nor their smiles allure me from the paths of virtue and religion, and that they never set upon me for that purpose but they had to retire foiled, and with a deeply wounded conscience, the Lord assisting me to speak his word with all boldness, they let me alone—apparently more afraid of my attacking them, than manifesting any disposition to attack me. So completely did persecution cease, that while some appeared to fear me, I found almost all ready to do me a kindness.

"Such had become the happy state of things when the regiment received orders to return home. We were soon embarked, and when we reached our native country, I sought and obtained leave of absence, to visit my father. To have an opportunity, sir, to fall at *his* feet, to confess my sins against *him*, and to obtain *his* forgiveness and blessing, had long and ardently been desired by me.

"Filled with deepest contrition, and fondest hopes, I hastened home. At length the 'natal village,' afar off, appeared to view, bringing with it many a guilty and painful reminiscence. It was at last reached and entered, and my father's house appeared in the distance. With a heart filled with remorse, and impatient of an opportunity to give expression to its sorrows and regrets, I hastened on to fall at his feet.

"I had not proceeded far up the street, when I met a funeral; and recognizing a near relative walking by the head of the coffin as 'chief mourner,' I inquired whose

funeral it was, and was told, alas, alas, that it was my sainted father's!"

His manly frame now shook and trembled. Tears, many, flowed from his eyes, and grief, that we all felt, sealed his lips. When he had sufficiently recovered so as to be able to speak, he said,

"I turned about and followed after it as I could. At the grave, I threw myself on his coffin, scarcely conscious what I did, or what I said. Those in attendance not having before seen me in my military costume, and not suspecting but what I and my regiment were still in the West Indies, were some time in recognizing me; but no sooner did they, than I could hear it murmuring around, 'He has brought down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.'

"Miserable comforters!" O that their accusation had been false! But alas, alas, it was too true. It is *mine*—the *guilt* of the premature death of both my dear parents.

"Tell it unto sinners—tell,
I am—I am out of hell!"

And tell them more—ininitely more—that I, 'through grace,' grace reigning through the righteousness of God my Saviour unto eternal life, though 'chief of sinners,' can say, as Saul of Tarsus, 'Yet I obtained mercy!'

"Thus, sir, I have given to you and to those present a very brief, but faithful epitome of what I believe to be the 'work of God' on my soul. You may have thought me long, but 'the half has not been told you.' The history of my sins against God—of such only as should not be named—would make a book; while that of his goodness and grace towards me would make another. To me belong shame and confusion of face only. To God alone must be ascribed the praise. By HIS GRACE, I am what I am. 'Not unto me, not unto me, but to God be the glory.'"

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